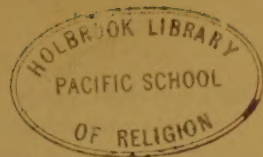


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

I have consulted several friends about the reaction of ordinary people to the proposal of a day of prayer. One of them, who has a somewhat varied experience and a considerable sensitiveness to what is going on, offers the following estimate—ten per cent. of the population who are devout and orthodox, and fall naturally into line; thirty per cent. who have a sense of religious need, but who do not find as a rule that the services offered meet their need; fifty per cent. who are entirely apathetic and indifferent (another correspondent, on the basis of his experience in the army, would put the percentage much higher); and ten per cent. who are actively hostile. This is, of course, only a guess, but it is something against which we may compare our own experience.

THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

The indifference is not necessarily a ground for discouragement. It is a healthy thing that people in general should find intolerable the idea of prayer (which still survives under one disguise or another in some circles of the pious) as a means of reminding a reluctant deity of his responsibility to defend the right, and inducing him to repair by supernatural aid the deficiencies of armaments, morale and generalship. A member high up in the army suggests that it is important to make clear that the day of prayer is "not a sort of pro-British activity."

But having rightly rejected this wrong conception of prayer, many are at a loss to know what purpose a national day of prayer can serve.

It is plain that any serious belief in God implies the certainty, complete and absolute, that He is well able to look after His own world. The only relevant question is whether we are in line with His purpose.

It is not a waste of time on our part to remind ourselves by a national act of recollection that the future does not lie in our hands. Forces are at work that are beyond human control. The war has taken a course which no one expected, and more surprises may be in store. Disease and famine may prove a bigger factor than armies and air fleets. This week's Supplement was not planned with the day of prayer in view, but its subject bears directly on the occasion. The unknown future which awaits us is something that we cannot command. When it comes, all that we can do is to respond. The national day of prayer is an opportunity to prepare ourselves for that response.

Professor Rosenstock-Huessy in America, whom I have already quoted in the News-Letter (C.N.-L. No. 101), has a remarkable gift for finding the apt phrase in which to pack the essential meaning of an epoch. In his *Out of Revolution* he sets in striking contrast the famous *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) of Descartes (1596-1650), which is the key word of the modern period of history, and what he suggests as a truer, deeper key-note for the age to be—*Respondeo etsi mutabor*, I answer though I have to change.

The starting point of Descartes laid the foundations of modern individualism. Man, relying on his own reason, set out to explore the universe, and the way was opened to

four hundred years of incredible scientific progress. Notwithstanding these triumphs, the fatal one-sidedness of this understanding of life is becoming clear. Man is not a detached thinker surveying the universe from a secure vantage point, but a creature exposed to the play of mighty forces and inextricably involved in unceasing conflict. His power to ask and answer questions, to measure and weigh, to manipulate and acquire, is only one half of him, and not the most important half. He is a being who has questions put to him. Imperative demands are made on him, not only by his fellow-men but by a power greater than himself, and by situations beyond his choice. Self-forgetting response to these unforeseen demands and to the beckoning future is the gateway to fullness of life.

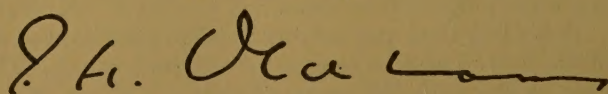
"Though I have to change." There is much in the national life to awaken doubt whether this country, unless it changes, is morally and spiritually capable of meeting the demands of the post-war period, or even of the war itself.

How shall this vital change come about? Everywhere, in ourselves and in others, we find a paralysis of action. We have no difficulty in acting in accord with established patterns of action. But when a really new start has to be made, we are at a loss. We can see intellectually that the world is falling to pieces and that some new birth is indispensable. But to translate that knowledge into action defeats us. We live in our present society by means of strong mutual defences against the truth. To break through these elaborate psychological structures, still more to have them broken down for us, cannot but be painful.

The effort is too great for individuals to make alone. Pioneering minds, who would remain ineffective in isolation, must draw together to stimulate each other's thought and to develop a solidarity of feeling strong enough to break down the barriers of ingrained habit and established routine, and thus to become the vehicle of new spiritual forces.

What better preparation can there be for this than by the common exercises of the day of prayer? What we do on that day, in our secret hearts or in public act, may prove, in spite of our hesitations, to be the most fruitful of all forms of action. Is not this, after all, the only true activism—that we should listen together for the dynamic, divine initiative and actively respond to it? On the condition, of course, that the response is made not merely in the subjective world of thought and resolve, but in the real world of encounter and concrete claims.

Yours sincerely,



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